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Math Centers!

Student Teaching GEM

Context: I have always loved the idea of using centers in the classroom. Centers keep students moving and also give them the opportunity to participate in a variety of learning tasks. However, I have also noticed inherent problems with center models in some of the classrooms I have seen. In some situations, it can be easier for students to be off task depending on where the teacher's focus is in the room. Transitions can be another rough spot—valuable instructional time is lost when students are asked to switch to new centers. I have wondered about how to successfully implement centers in my classroom while avoiding the pitfalls that can also be associated with this instructional method.

So... how can a teacher successfully implement a math center model that ensures students are on-task and engaged in meaningful learning?!

STEPS TO SUCCESS!:

- **Create 3 groups.** Groups in my classroom were heterogeneous, which worked well. Students performing at a higher level were able to help those who were less proficient in mathematics.
- **Create 3 meaningful centers.** In my class, we had Math Portfolio, Math Notebook, and Math Boxes. Designate a space in the room for each station.
 - **MATH PORTFOLIO:** Directly reinforces the day's mini lesson. Usually a worksheet that involves hands-on exploration and working with peers.
 - **MATH NOTEBOOK:** Writing about math. Students respond to a math prompt daily that facilitates higher order thinking.
 - **MATH BOXES:** Students complete a Math Boxes page from their Math Journal to reinforce mathematical concepts.
- **Establish procedures.** After recess, my class knew that they were to go to their "Math Table" marked by their group's flag. Once seated, I would deliver a mini lesson to the class before proceeding with center activities.
- **Smooth transitions.** Students knew that when they heard the bell chime, it was time to switch. They would clean up their materials quietly and be ready for the next activity. Alternatively, my teacher and I started moving to each group instead of having the groups move – this really cut down on transition time.
- **Be organized.** There was a box at each center that held the required materials for the day. This helped maximize instructional time because students did not have to hunt for materials.